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COVID-19 Connections: An Existential View of a Pandemic

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Blog Posts

Title: Covid Connections

March 20th, 2020

I have no idea how to start this, or what to say. How do you start a philosophy blog in the middle of a pandemic?

I guess I'll start by introducing myself. My name's Rose, and I'm a current junior at a small college in Ohio. I'm a student athlete (a swimmer) and I'm an English major. I just got kicked off my college campus like most other college students across the country when the coronavirus hit. I'm now living at home with my parents in Vermont, except it doesn't feel like home because my parents just moved here a few months ago and I don't know anyone, and I don't know my way around. I'm originally from Louisiana, so I'm nowhere near any of my friends right now, and I'm an only child, so I don't have anyone my own age to hang around with.

I haven't done much schoolwork since getting kicked off my campus, because it's technically spring break week and I'm too overwhelmed right now to do any schoolwork. But I'm starting this blog because I've been taking a philosophy class this semester all about existentialism, and some of the things we've been reading really seem to relate to this pandemic. I've always wanted to take a philosophy class, particularly one where we got to do a lot of reading, because I love reading so much. That's why I signed up for this class about existentialism, and I've been finding it really interesting. Basically, existentialism is this philosophical idea that life has no inherent meaning, and that people have free will to do whatever they want. Right now, my class is reading *The Plague* by Albert Camus, so there are SO many connections I could make with that book and the situation I'm in right now. *The Plague*

is about a town who is struck with a plague, and then the town becomes shut off from the rest of the world. I don't know how it ends because I haven't finished it yet. Anyway, that's what this blog is going to be for: a place for me to place those connections between these philosophy texts and this experience. Plus, it'll be a good way for me to record history (Which is weird to think about: how am I the person that's living through history and recording it? That's crazy!). I really want to capture what I'm living through right now, and I think showing how it relates to some of these books we're reading for my philosophy class will be intriguing. I think this blog will be mostly for me, even though there will be strangers reading it. Being able to share my connections and my experiences with strangers, but not close friends, is kind of a cool feature of a blog. It feels right, somehow, especially because when I try to talk to some of the people in my life about existentialism, they aren't very receptive of it. It's like, these big questions about the meaning of life don't get to them, or at least aren't things they want to discuss. So I guess I'll discuss those things here, on this blog.

March 27th, 2020

I've come to the conclusion that a lot of people in this country are all having the same experience in quarantine. Terms like "social distancing" and "shelter in place" and "quarantine" are becoming common household terms. It seems like everyone is using zoom, which is strange, because I assumed we would all be using skype. The only interaction with people who don't live in my house is online and through my phone, and so everyone is on social media, all the time. But the social media experience is different now. No more vacation pictures and people hanging out with their friends. People are posting a lot of memes and selfies now, or photos of them in their houses, or trying to romanticize the situation. The captions are all related to the coronavirus. It's like you can't get away from it. Sometimes I want to just turn off my phone and my laptop so

that I don't read the news, or see other people talking about coronavirus, but then I want to talk

to my friends, and that has to be done through my phone or laptop too.

    Some people are making the best of this: there are people doing workout challenges,

trying to get into shape, and others are learning how to cook or hosting game nights with their

families. I'm having a really hard time doing that. I know this isn't permanent, and I'll get to go

back to Ohio for my internship this summer. And I have no connection to this town in Vermont,

either. I don't know where the grocery store or the pharmacy are, and I have no friends here. I

don't know anyone here except for my parents. But mostly, I miss my friends and my boyfriend

Liam. It's been two weeks since I've seen all of them, and I really just want to go back to

campus. I'm sick of being stuck in the house. At least I'm not completely alone, I have my

parents, but we've run out of things to talk about (except for conversations about coronavirus-

those are never ending, and I'm sick of talking about that!). But to some extent, I feel like a lot of

people who are keeping themselves so, so busy by working out constantly and picking up new

hobbies and such are just trying to distract themselves from doing any thinking at all. There's

this band that Liam and I like called AJR and they have a song called "The Entertainment's

Here" that's all about how people like to be entertained to keep themselves from thinking about

the bigger questions in life.

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"I've been thinking, that too much thinking

Can start me sinking down

But, oh my oh my God the entertainment's here

Everything is suddenly amazing here

Sit back man, relax man

Sit back man, don't make plans

</div>

'Cause oh my oh my God the entertainment's here

You don't even gotta use your brain from here

Just sit back man, relax man

Sit back man, come on then"

I definitely want to think about the big questions, though. I don't want just not use my brain, as they say in the song. But at the same time, I am bored.

I don't know. I guess that I do wish I was one of those people that had the motivation to do lots of workouts and make fancy meals at home. Instead, I barely have enough motivation to get all my assignments done. It's like I have no focus at all here. I miss the campus library. I was so productive there, and there was a coffee shop that always smelled amazing inside the library. I miss coffee shops. I miss eating out. We haven't gotten takeout since the pandemic started. My parents are too worried someone is going to sneeze in their food. I guess that's fair, but I'd really like to order a pizza. I guess that's not my biggest problem, though.

Anyway, I've been spending my time trying my best to get assignments done, attending zoom classes, and watching old tv shows from Netflix on my laptop. That and sending Liam and my friends funny little gifs or memes or things I find online- anything that isn't related to coronavirus. I just can't talk about it anymore. Mom and Dad and I keep having the same conversation- when will this be over? When will they be able to go back to working in their offices, and when will I be able to go back to Ohio for school? There's never any answers. We never come to any sort of conclusion, and it's really frustrating. I'm the sort of person who likes to plan my life out, and I feel like I can't do that at all right now. It's bad enough that I don't know what I want to do when I graduate college, or if I want to live in Vermont with my parents,

Ohio with Liam and my friends, or Louisiana with my family and friends from high school, or maybe somewhere completely different. But now I can't even plan out the next few months.

I haven't unpacked my room yet. Since my parents moved here a few months ago and I hadn't been here yet, my room hadn't been touched. All my books and clothes and everything that wasn't at college is still in boxes, and all my stuff from college is still all packed up too. I can't bring myself to unpack everything. Then staying here, and this whole terrible situation, will feel permanent.

March 30th, 2020

To-Do:

- unpack boxes from school

-laundry and wash sheets!

-hang curtains

-hang up decorations

-find my phone charger- stop using Mom's!

I keep seeing all these things online that are like "your feelings are valid". I know this isn't exactly an ideal situation, but for me, everything is okay. I don't know anyone who has the coronavirus, and I'm healthy myself. I just have to spend some time at home right now. I feel kind of dumb for being so down in the dumps lately. And I feel kind of dumb for the way I've been moping around and living my life. Are my feelings about all of this, and the way I've been moping around really valid? I'm not sure.

I made a playlist of all my favorite songs that make me happy this morning and went for a run before my first class. It was hard. Like, embarrassingly hard. I'm supposed to be a college athlete. Granted my sport is swimming, and doesn't involve any running, but I've gotten so out

of shape in the last few weeks because pools and gyms are closed. Still, it was good to move my body. Even though I had no idea where I was going, and I got lost on my run in my own neighborhood (which is pretty embarrassing) I feel like it cleared my head. I guess my "period of sheer lethargy" is over, like they say in Camus' *The Plague*. Basically, Camus, the author, goes through and explains the several different stages the citizens seem to be going through as they are quarantined in their town, with no connection to the outside world. While I have plenty of connections to the outside world (thank goodness for iphones), I feel like many of these stages are similar. The "period of sheer lethargy" really resonates with me, and I'm guessing with a lot of other people right now too, based on how my friends say they're feeling, and what I've been reading online about how others are feeling. Camus describes how this phase is "at once the easiest and hardest" for a character named Rambert. Rambert has been walking around the whole town, and he's gone everywhere he can, so now he's just "drifting aimlessly from cafe to cafe". Granted, things are different, and I'd LOVE to go to a cafe, but the last couple days I've felt like I've gone everywhere there is to go in this house, and I feel like I've done everything there is to do. For the last few days, I felt like I had no purpose, and I felt lethargic. This phase does feel hard, but also I feel like it should be easy. Everything in my little bubble is ok. No one I love is sick. I'm healthy, and since my main priority at the time is being a student, and miraculously my grades haven't slipped, I'm fine. But it still feels so hard.

I feel like reading this book has kind of helped me justify my feelings. I'm going through a lot of the same things the characters in this book are going through- days where I feel lethargic, asking the same questions about when things will get better, and wondering how I can possibly keep up relationships (particularly a romantic one) without seeing the people I'm trying to keep

up relationships with. I'm not sure reading this book has made my experience any better, but it's certainly validating my feelings.

Maybe that's what made me feel better- feeling as though someone understood what I was going through. After my existentialism class this morning, I finally unpacked my stuff in my bedroom. I put away my clothes and books and hung up all the decorations and posters and stuff from my old house and from my dorm, and I have to say, it looks nicer in here and I do feel better. I know I'll only be here a short while, but once I'd finished unpacking and started on my homework, I felt more productive in a room where I wasn't surrounded by cardboard boxes. Plus, I think seeing all my posters from my favorite bands and the bright colors in my decorations made my mood better. Today is the first day since I left campus that I actually felt good. In part 2 of the book *The Plague*, when some of the characters (one of whom is a doctor) are talking about whether or not the plague will go away and things will get better, one of the characters states that "one must never lose hope". I guess that means I shouldn't lose hope either. Things will be better by the beginning of the summer, and I'll be reunited with my friends. Everything is going to be okay. At least, that's how I feel today.

April 2nd, 2020

A little less than two months until school ends, and my internship starts. Thank goodness. That really great day I had earlier in the week where I wrote about how I felt better and how I had motivation to work out and get things done? Yeah, well, that's not how I feel today. Today I feel kind of like the Eeyore character from Winne the Pooh. I know this will end, but I feel like this is going to be the longest two months of my life. I miss my friends, and I miss Liam.

Liam's wonderful. We met right at the beginning of college on move in day, and we lived in the same building. He's pretty good at communicating, and because we have a solid

relationship, I'm not too worried about spending two months apart. Liam lives really close to the university, so we're not anywhere near each other right now, and it's the worst. I miss him. We've been apart for long periods of time before, during summers, but that was different. We had things to do and ways to distract ourselves from being apart, but not this time. Last summer, he came to visit me, and we spent the week visiting different parts of Louisiana, where I used to live, and going on dates to all my favorite restaurants in town. I can't wait to see him when summer starts. I'm going to live at my friend Ella's house for the summer, and her house is only about 45 minutes away from his, so we'll be able to see each other. We've already started coming up with things we want to do this summer: things like hiking, and going out on his dad's boat. After these past few weeks spent inside, I can't wait to spend the summer outside. Just making plans makes me feel so much better.

I've been thinking about my feelings about this situation and coronavirus, and I've realized that I miss my friends and Liam more than I'm upset by the actual coronavirus outbreak. I don't know anyone personally who has coronavirus, and no one I know knows anyone who has it. I keep seeing all these conspiracy theories that the entire thing has been made up by our government, but that seems too ridiculous to be true. I guess it's "fake news"... but who knows. The term "fake news" is so political. I don't want this to be a political blog. While politics are an important issue, I want this blog to focus only on my experiences with the coronavirus, and my connections to philosophy. I'd like to keep politics separate from that.

Anyway, I was reading this section of *The Plague* the other day that kind of talks about that idea- that I'm more upset by the situation than the actual virus. It seems like the people in the town where *The Plague* takes place are experiencing the same thing.This character I mentioned last time, Rambert, who is a reporter from another town who is now stuck in Oran

(the name of the town with the plague) experiences this feeling. He misses his wife, and he has absolutely no reason to be in Oran- he has no friends, family or business being there but he is stuck there because of the quarantine imposed on the town. He actually considers escaping so that he can see his wife, which just goes to show that he's not super concerned about the actual plague. Now, as much as I miss Liam, I don't think I'm going to "escape" and go see him… but I still understand Raymond's urgency to see his wife. There's one part of the book that reads "The egoism of love made them immune to the general distress and, if they thought of the plague, it was only in so far as it might threaten to make their separation eternal" when talking about people in Oran who missed those they loved. I get that- it really does feel like I'm going to be apart from Liam forever, but I know it only feels that way, and it's not true. But I do know that I'm thinking a lot more about Liam (and my friends!) than I am about coronavirus.

I'm finished reading *The Plague*. Soon, my class is starting the book *No Exit* by Jean-Paul Sarte. I guess it's a play, and so it's a bit shorter, but I'm interested to see the parallels between this play and our coronavirus- riddled quarantine reality. Plus, things are probably going to get better soon, so it'll be interesting for me to track that progress here! But I'll probably keep talking about *The Plague*. The book is written in a way that recounts each stage of the plague, so I'll probably want to return to different parts of the book as our pandemic progresses.

April 8th, 2020

I have had this terrible sinking feeling in my stomach for the last few days. I feel like… maybe all of this isn't going to go away by the time the summer starts. I think that I'd assumed everything was going to get better quickly, and it's not. I feel like I have absolutely no control over my life, and I hate it. I just don't know what to do, and I don't know how to make this better. There are 1,158 cases today.We've all been acting like this is temporary, but what if it's

not? Things are not getting better, they're getting worse. Some days, the weight of all of this seems manageable. Today is not one of those days.

I feel like I've been doing the same things every day. I get up, and I look at my phone and scroll through social media for longer than I probably should. Then I take a shower and put on clean pajamas (I don't think I've worn anything but pajamas since I got to Vermont) and eat a bowl of cereal downstairs in the kitchen. Then I come back up here to my room and I go to my virtual classes and I do my homework. Sometimes if the weather is nice and I'm having a good day and I have motivation, I work out and go for a run. But running mostly sucks, and it's hard, and I miss swimming. There's no pools open. So, most days, I just watch tv and facetime my best friend from college, Louise. Louise is pretty great- we've been friends so long that we can just sit and complain to each other and not have to worry about having a filter or being judged for anything, and that's exactly what we do on these facetime calls. We just complain.

After dinner, I usually talk on the phone with Liam, but it feels like we're running out of things to say, so sometimes we just sit on the phone and send each other tweets or posts on Instagram and talk about those instead.

I guess in retrospect, it doesn't sound awful, but I haven't left my neighborhood in forever. I miss my friends. I miss Liam. I miss going to classes in person. I miss when my days were not all the same, every single day.

We've started reading the play *No Exit* for class. It's pretty interesting. The premise is that there's these three people that have died, but their afterlife situation isn't exactly what they thought it would be. I'm not through with the book, so I'm not sure about this, but I don't think they're in heaven. It doesn't really seem like hell, either though. The three of them are all just stuck in this room (I think that's why it's called *No Exit*) that doesn't have any mirrors, and

they're all driving each other crazy. They're all really selfish, and they're only interested in what they want, I know that much. But the thing that really strikes me about this book so far is that they are unable to control their situation and what's going on around them, and that's what makes them miserable. Man oh man can I see that reflected in my life.

I can't control anything about this situation. I don't want to be stuck at home in a place where I don't know anyone. I don't want to take my classes online over zoom anymore. I don't want to do any of this. I'm sick of all my tv shows, and I'm sick of charging my phone all the time because I'm constantly using it. I wish I had some control over this. I wish I was quarantined with a friend. Or with Liam. But I think not having any control over this situation is what's making me so unhappy. I keep trying to think about what I can do to take control over this situation, and how I can get some value out of this time being stuck at home away from college, and I'm having a really hard time with it.

There's this idea in existentialism that we've been talking about in class: this idea of absurdity. I guess it's usually associated with Camus, who wrote *The Plague*. The idea is basically that it's absurd to try and find value in the world when it's inherently meaningless. I feel like trying to find value in this time where I'm quarantined also feels meaningless some days (today being one of them). I just don't know what to do. I feel so stuck.

April 17th, 2020

The president announced his plan for opening the country back up again. I guess it's good news, but it also worries me because I feel like the country isn't ready to open. Anyone who is reading this likely knows what the president's plan is, but I'll explain it a little anyway.

The president is planning to open the country back up in stages. Essentially, each stage will bring about a new set of things people can open. Like in stage 2, for example, schools can

open back up. Each state can progress through the stages at their own pace, and each stage has to last 14 days at a minimum. Then, there are requirements I think, that each state has to meet before they can move onto the next stage.

I'm not sure I want to discuss my opinions about this in this blog, as I fear that the blog then may become political, and I have already talked about this, but I don't want to write a political blog. Personally, I prefer to stay out of politics. But for the sake of accurately showing my experiences, thoughts, and feelings throughout this pandemic, I do feel as though I need to share them briefly.

I don't think we should be opening the country back up so soon. It seems to me that since the number of cases has risen, not gone down, we shouldn't have opened the country back up. I think the president is worried about the economy taking more of a hit than it already has, and opening the country back up will boost the economy. And while the economy is important, it seems to me that the president is prioritizing the economy over people's lives. If the country opens back up, there will be more cases, and therefore there will be more people that die.

But then I think about my personal situation, and my thoughts get muddy. If the country opens back up, I'll be able to start my internship this summer. I'll be able to go back to Ohio, and see Liam and my friends this summer. And if the country opens back up and the economy is no longer so terrible, it will be easier for me to find a job next year. I don't know a whole lot about the economy and finances and that sort of thing, but I do know that I'll be graduating with an English degree and I also know that I'm not entirely sure what I'm going to do with that. Finding an entry-level job with an English degree is going to be hard enough, and I don't need the economy in bad shape. That's certainly not going to help me.

So I guess I have mixed feelings. And I guess that's normal. In *The Plague*, no one agrees with the town's leaders all the time, and in real life, people don't always agree with the actions of the president. What's that saying, a president can't please everyone? I think that applies here.

April 26th, 2020

So, I have some very bad news. My grandma caught the virus.

I'm trying to stay optimistic. She and my grandpa live in a nursing home in Louisiana, and they haven't taken her to the hospital or anything, so I guess it's mild. I've heard that people who are older though are more at risk of dying from the virus, and my grandma is in her eighties. But apparently she's okay right now.

I know this is dumb, but I wish we lived closer to my grandparents' nursing home. It's not like I could go see them, but I wish I could like… go set up a lawn chair outside my grandma's window and talk to her.

I feel so terrible. I haven't made much of an effort to see my grandparents (or any of my family, really) since college. Between my classes, swimming, and going to an out-of-state university, I wasn't able to go back home to Louisiana very much and see my family. Now, we're nowhere near them. I saw my grandparents in January, right before my parents moved, but it wasn't for very long. Grandma has some form of dementia, and it's been progressing pretty quickly these last few years. Sometimes she has moments where she understands what's going on, and other times, she seems like she's in another world, or like she's really confused and upset. It's awful. She must be so confused right now. She's in isolation, and there's no one else around to comfort her, except the nurses that go in to help her do basic things, and even then I'm sure they're wearing all kinds of protective gear, and she probably doesn't understand that very much of what's happening to her. It's awful. I just wish there was something I could do.

I'm too worried about my grandma to do much of anything school related. I can't even think about existentialism right now. I know Grandma would have just told me to pray about it, or at least that's what she would have told me to do when she knew what was going on, but it doesn't seem like religion and existentialism get along very well together. We learned in class the other day that since existentialism's main idea is that nothing has any inherent meaning, so that essentially rules out the possibility of religion being something that existentialists see as valid. I'm not really religious, but Grandma is. She'd be really upset to find out I haven't gone to church in about five years. Maybe I should pray? I don't know. I just feel so confused and overwhelmed and I don't know what to think or do. I just want Grandma to be okay.

April 27th, 2020

Grandma's in the hospital. I'm really worried. I guess they took her to the hospital because she was having breathing problems and needed oxygen. How scary is that? I wish there was something I could do to help. I think because there's nothing I can do really, I've been trying to distract myself with other things. I found a bunch of old canvases and paints in the basement, and we've had a few warm days so I've been sitting outside painting. There's a few books on my shelf I haven't read yet, so I've been trying to read those, and I've been trying to stay active. I ordered a yoga mat online and I've been doing yoga in my room and trying to go outside and run, too. I feel like I'm trying to find meaning in this time by taking up hobbies. I feel like if I enjoy myself, this time isn't wasted. Like maybe if I find a hobby I really love, I won't have wasted all this time stuck at home. But I can't focus very well on anything right now. I guess I feel the need to do something important with this time. Everyone's been talking about what sorts of things people have done during past quarantines. Like for example, Shakespeare wrote some of his greatest works during the black plague when he was stuck in a quarantine. I recognize that

asking myself to write something or do something at the level of Shakespeare's work in quarantine while I'm taking college classes is maybe a little ridiculous, but it's something I feel the need to do, at least on a smaller scale. People are saying they're going to write books in quarantine, lose weight they've been trying to lose for years, or learn how to play an instrument … things like that. Is it enough to just keep my head above water and do my best in my college classes? Or do I need to do something more? I have no idea what the expectations are anymore.

But anyway. Back to my point. Keeping myself busy with hobbies is all great and fine, but my mind still wanders. I worry about Grandma. I worry about what's going to happen in the future. I worry that this virus won't go away. I worry that someone else I love will catch the virus. I worry that I will catch the virus. I worry about everything these days it seems.

May 2nd, 2020

Grandma passed away this morning. Maybe I should have seen this coming, but that doesn't change the fact that I have absolutely no idea how to handle this. She's the first family member I've had ever pass away. I guess it wasn't necessarily the coronavirus, but a complication of the coronavirus. Her kidneys failed as a result of the coronavirus.

We can't even have a funeral. For one, we'd have to travel to go see her, and travel is out of the question right now- you're really not supposed to travel with the coronavirus because everyone is supposed to stay at home. And then, if we held a funeral, lots of people would want to come, and you're not supposed to be in big groups right now.

I have no idea how to process this. I have no idea what to do with myself. To make matters worse, it's finals week. I have papers to turn in and I haven't started them. I have even less focus than I did last week. I just can't do anything.

Grief is such a strange emotion, and I don't know how to handle it.

I just keep remembering Grandma standing in the kitchen, cooking, or baking. I remember going to church services with her and all her friends saying how much I'd grown up. I remember calling Grandma in high school when my parents and I were having fights. I remember going to see her and Grandpa in the summer after hanging out at the pool, since they lived so close. I remember going to see plays and musicals with Grandma and Grandpa. What am I supposed to do now? What's Grandpa going to do? Who is going to keep him company? Especially now in the pandemic?

To-Do:

-study for English final

-study for existentialism final

-finish editing existentialism paper

-call Louise?

-laundry!!!

-buy vitamins

May 3rd, 2020

So, in addition to grief, now I'm feeling kind of angry at myself. Here's why. I've been acting like this pandemic is something that's just been getting in the way of me living my life. I've been upset that I've had my college experience taken away from me, and I've been upset that I haven't been able to see my friends and Liam. I've been upset that I have to live at home with my parents as a 20-year-old. I've been upset that I can't go to the gym to work out, to go to restaurants, to movie theatres.

And while all of that is valid, I've been more upset that this pandemic is interrupting my life than anything else. I've been more upset that my world has been flipped upside down than

the fact that there are people out there contracting this virus and dying from it, or dying from complications it's caused, as was the case with Grandma. I haven't been focusing on the real issues. I've been selfish. And I'm angry with myself.

How could my thinking be so… narrow-minded? How could I not see the bigger picture? How could I be so selfish? And what in the world am I supposed to do with myself now? I know I've talked about this before… there's a section of *The Plague* that talks about how the citizens of the town of Oran are initially more worried about their lives being turned upside down rather than the actual plague. But it seems as though the book progresses and the situation becomes more dire, people can't help but pay attention to what really matters: the situation at hand with the plague. Maybe that's the same for me. I still feel so ridiculous, though.

I wish this was more simple. Clearly, there are bigger issues than missing my friends, people are really dying from this thing. And, as I'm reading in the news, there are people that aren't dying, but are continuing to have long-lasting health issues long after they are no longer contagious. And as awful as that is, that doesn't make my feelings invalid. I've lost some of my college experiences. I'll never get that back, and that's something that can't be replaced. People have told me that college is "the best four years of your life" but I'm having an awful time right now. And Grandma passing? That makes it even worse. I miss her, and I feel guilty that I didn't travel home to Louisiana more to spend time with her, and with the rest of my family. I just don't know how to feel. I know I'm experiencing grief, but I'm experiencing a lot of other conflicting emotions too.

At least I know I'm not the only one who's felt this way. The citizens of Oran were more upset about their personal situations than the plague at first, too. But maybe that's a problem. If everyone is more concerned about missing out on seeing their friends than the actual pandemic

we're experiencing, is that going to cause problems? Are people going to start breaking rules because they don't understand the depth of this situation? Am I allowed to feel sorry for myself for the college experiences I'm missing out on, or should I focus on bigger problems? I have so many unanswered questions. But mostly, when will this get better? When will my heart stop hurting for Grandma?

May 10th, 2020

It feels like it's been forever since I made a blog entry. I guess it's only been about a week, but I've been busy these last few days. Between finals and Grandma passing, my blog hasn't exactly been at the top of my to- do list.

I really just had to put my head down last week and try to get things done. If I'm honest, I don't think I did so well in one of my finals. Grades come out soon though, so I guess I'll find out.

Nothing feels real. Grandma passing doesn't really feel real. Like, I'm very upset, but I still feel like the magnitude of the situation hasn't come crashing down on me yet. I'm a pretty outwardly emotional person, and that's not at all how I've been processing this. I think none of this feels real because I haven't seen her. I didn't see her sick in a hospital, there's no funeral plans right now. We're going to have one later, I guess, when things are better. But my point is that this isn't usually how people deal with loved ones dying. I guess we aren't even going to have a zoom funeral, which is apparently something people are doing. My family doesn't like to talk about hard things very much. I guess it's good that they try to focus on the positives, but right now I think we need to address the bad things in front of us… and we just aren't. It's like how I wish I could talk to them about these big existential questions I have but I feel like I can't.

Anyway, I don't know how to process this, so I guess I just have to move onto the next thing. I don't even know what that is at this point. I'm supposed to start my internship at the end of May, but it seems like it's going to be pushed back until the beginning of July. Which is okay, I'm a little disappointed because I want to get back to my normal life, but I guess another week or two won't make much difference. I recognize that I need the downtime anyway. Now that school is over and my internship doesn't start for a while, I have time to just relax. I'm going to just watch lots of movies, and re-read some of my favorite books. I talk with Louise and Liam all the time, which is really nice. Now that we all have time to talk with each other, and we're not busy with classes, it's almost guaranteed that if I call someone they'll answer. We have nothing else to do.

One of my teammates, Ella, has been amazing about talking about all this stuff with Grandma's death. She and I FaceTime nearly everyday now, and just talk. We talk about the pandemic, and about Grandma passing, and about everything Ella is struggling with too. Listening to Ella talk about her problems really seems to help me, actually. It makes me take a step back and realize that there are other people living their lives, and experiencing this pandemic in a completely different way than I am. Talking to Ella really makes me feel relaxed, and it always has. She and I have been friends since freshman year when we met. We swim the same strokes, so a lot of the time we do the same thing during practices, and I think that's when we bonded. We've been roommates for the last two years, and she's honestly kind of messy and disorganized, but she's one of the kindest, most understanding people I've ever met. She went to a private Catholic high school, so we've been talking a lot about how I feel sort of guilty because I haven't been to church in years. Ella kind of feels the same way. Since college, she hasn't gone to church or anything either, but she doesn't feel the pull to go to church that I now feel. She's

said she never felt that community aspect that I always felt at Grandma's church. I wonder if I went to a church service now how I'd feel about that community aspect.

I finished the play *No Exit* during finals week. I actually submitted a paper for that class, drawing a comparison to our situation and the end of the story in the play. Throughout the play, the three characters are in hell, locked in a room. The door won't open. At the end of the play, the door opens, and none of them ever even bother leaving. At first glance, this seems strange because they're miserable: why would they want to stay in that situation? But then it becomes clear that the reason they stay is because they feel like leaving is pointless.

Maybe this is a silly comparison to make, but that decision really resonated with me. If I could leave my self-quarantine situation, it would be pointless. If the door to my house suddenly swung open, and I knew I could leave and go about my normal life… well, it wouldn't make sense because my actions have consequences. I'd infect someone else, or I would get sick. I may have free will, but my actions do have consequences. This idea of absurdity comes up a lot in existential readings, apparently.

But absurdity can take other meanings too. Mostly, absurdity, when talking about existentialism, means that we're constantly searching for meaning in a life where there is no meaning (and this is why religion and existentialism don't get along so well). I don't know. I feel so confused. Why do I feel drawn to existential literature, but also drawn to religion? I've been thinking about Christianity so much since Grandma passed. I remember being small, and going to Grandma and Grandpa's church. Everyone there was so welcoming and kind. I felt such a strong sense of community and I felt somehow very safe.

But existential literature is so interesting, too! Everything I've read for class has just made me ask more questions and want to learn more.

I know my existentialism class is over, and I've done all the readings for that class. But I reached out to my professor, and I explained that I'm still interested in learning more, and I have so many questions. She sent me a short list of titles I could read, so in short, this blog is far from over. Since the pandemic isn't over either, and I clearly have plenty of time until my internship starts, I figured I'd keep reading, and keep up the blog. The next book I'm reading is called *Waiting for Godot*. I ordered it online and it hasn't come in the mail yet, though.

I'm such an English major. I can't wait for this book to come in the mail. It's funny how it really is the little things that keep us going in these tough times.

May 12th, 2020

Okay, so, bad news. My internship got cancelled. I have so many mixed feelings.

Obviously, I miss Liam, and I miss my friends. And if I had my internship this summer in Ohio, I'd be living there and I'd be able to see all of them, even if the hangouts were all socially distanced hangouts. It's better than nothing- my friends and I like spending time outside together anyway.

But more than that, I don't really want to be alone until August. I know I'm with my parents here, but I miss being with people my own age. And it's not like this pandemic is exactly conducive to making new friends. Under normal circumstances, I'd join a club or a gym or something.

But then there's also this sense of relief passing over me. My internship was supposed to be a social media internship, and I was kind of dreading doing that. It's not that I was ungrateful for the opportunity, I just didn't want to be a social media manager for the rest of my life. I don't know what I *do* want to do with my life, but at least I have a year to figure that out.

So, mixed feelings. I just feel kind of like I'm just waiting for nothing. Like, what if my university doesn't open back up in the fall? I feel like I'm just going to be sitting here waiting for… forever.

I'm relating way too much to *Waiting For Godot*. The book came in the mail yesterday morning, and I finished it this afternoon- I have nothing else to do, and it was a short play where not much really happens. But just like the play, I'm just waiting for something that feels like it's never going to come. In the play, the two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon spend the entire play waiting for Godot, another character who never comes. I think Godot is supposed to be God, but my Godot is just… this whole situation being over. Throughout the play, Vladimir and Estragon, just spend their time talking about nothing, and their conversations don't make a lot of sense. Sometimes I feel like that's what this blog is: just me talking about nothing. When I take a step back, not much has happened since March. The pandemic started affecting everyone's lives, Grandma passed away, and then I finished school. What in the world have I been saying? Is this blog valuable?

I'm getting off on a tangent here. What I was going to say is that all of the waiting for nothing, and conversations about nothing in the play *Waiting for Godot* contribute to the idea in existentialism that nothing matters, and there's no inherent meaning behind anything. That theory is kind of essential to existentialism, and honestly that really bothers me. How can it be that nothing matters? How are we all here if nothing matters? It doesn't quite make sense to me. Maybe that's why I'm so drawn to existential literature: I don't have an answer to that. But I've also felt so drawn to Christianity lately, since Grandma passed. I feel like all religion is like the polar opposite of existentialism. If existentialism says that there is no inherent meaning in everything, how can any religion be valid? Religion, or at least I think Christianity, gives life a

purpose: to serve God, and to love others. So which is right? And why am I drawn to these two completely different things?

On a different note, I need something to do with myself this summer besides run this blog and read books. I was talking to my mom about this the other day, and she told me to look at the classes my university is offering this summer and take one of two of those. Dad says I should try to find a remote internship. He thinks that this pandemic is going to be around for several years, and thinks that I need to have some remote work experience on my resume. They've both got good ideas, but I'm not sure I want an internship if I don't know what I want to do with my life. I have no idea what classes I could take, but I should probably take a look at the course catalog.

All this waiting, and not knowing what I'm going to do when I graduate has started to get to me. There's an AJR song called "The Good Part" that I really love. The guys in the band talk about being on a college campus, and not knowing what they're going to do with their lives, and there's this repeating part in the song about wanting to "skip to the good part" and I feel that right now, with being stuck at home.

"Can we skip to the good part?

...

If there's a good part then

I hope it's not far 'cause

I thought it'd be today

…

If the world gets me

Where I'm supposed to be

Will I know I've made it then?

It's so hard

So can we skip to the good part?"

How will I know I've made it? How will I know when I've made the right decisions about my career? And when the heck is all this corona stuff going to be over?

May 16th, 2020

Something I've been thinking about a lot is the ideas of religion and existentialism together. Ever since my grandmother passed away, I feel this pull towards religion, and going to church. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that whenever I was with her in church, or at church functions, I felt at peace. People in her church group were always so kind and welcoming, and I felt very safe.

Now, in my day-to-day life, things are very different. Because of the coronavirus, everyone shuts each other out, and stays away from each other. People keep their distance, as they should, but along with that, it seems that people are less friendly. The couple of times I've left the house to go to the grocery store for Mom, I've noticed that people are more stand-offish than they used to be. Maybe I'm just craving being around kind people, or normalcy, but I feel like if there was some way for me to go to church right now, and feel that sense of peace and community with a group of friendly people, life would feel better. Going to church would also connect me with my grandma, I think.

But here's the other thing: I also feel this pull towards existentialism. And I don't know why, I can't really explain this pull. Maybe it's the connections I'm seeing between existentialism and my everyday life now that the coronavirus is impacting every part of my day. Maybe it's the search for something real. But I feel this strong pull towards understanding the

concepts and ideas existentialism presents. I think that's part of the reason why I'm still writing this blog, long after my existentialism class has come to an end. And all of this is fine- but I just feel like there's this clash between existentialism and religion.

Religion is about a belief in something greater than oneself, a belief in God. For Grandma, that was a belief in God and Jesus, because she was Christian. Her life had meaning because she served God. But existentialism says that life is inherently without meaning. So I feel like those two things don't go together. And I feel like I have to pick which belief system I want, and I don't like that. I wish I could somehow choose both.

I really want to believe in the existence of God. I want to think that there is a God that is out there, watching over us, loving us. Especially right now, as the world seems to be descending into chaos. To think that we have someone on our side is wonderful. I was talking to my friend Lousie about this on FaceTime this morning, and she told me to go listen to this song by Jon Bellion called "Maybe IDK". There's this one verse that says:

"Although I guess if I knew tomorrow

I guess I wouldn't need faith

I guess if I never fell, I guess I wouldn't need grace

I guess if I knew His plans, I guess He wouldn't be God…

Maybe I don't know, maybe I don't know

But maybe that's okay"

In this song, the singer clearly has found peace in the unknown. And I think that's what Louise was trying to explain to me, and I understand that. But I just don't know if I can find

peace in the unknown. I understand that that's essentially what faith is, but I just have so many questions.

I really liked the song, though, and I started listening to other Jon Bellion songs, and I liked those a lot too. They all made me think about life and my purpose on earth, and how I want to live my life once all of this is over. I have one year of college left, and then the rest of my life after this. What do I want to do? What do I want my impact to be on this world?

May 20th, 2020

I took a big step this week, and I actually shared this blog with someone I know: my existentialism professor from last semester! I was planning to have this blog sort of just be like a safe space and a diary for myself, and hope that other readers (who were strangers) could get something out of it. Maybe you, the reader, have found that you're living through similar experiences, and that's why you're reading this. Maybe you're just finding it interesting. Maybe you just want to see how this story ends. But it came to my attention last week as I was listening to a lot of Jon Bellion, that so many of us think a lot about the impact we leave on this earth and on other people. Clearly, this existentialism class has made me do a lot of thinking about these topics outside of class, and it's made a real impact on me. I wanted to share that with my professor, so I sent her the link to this blog.

Honestly, it felt kind of scary sharing this with another person. I know that there are people reading this blog, but everyone who is reading this except for my professor is a stranger to me. At least, that's what I assume. I suppose someone I know could have found this, but I feel like that's unlikely. I guess it feels odd to share these personal thoughts with someone I know, but I know she'll understand the positive impact she has had on me as she reads this blog.

I've still been thinking a lot about the whole religion thing. I've been doing so much "research" about existentialism as I read these books, but I feel like I haven't really immersed myself in religion the same way. It's difficult right now, when I can't exactly go to church. I've toyed with the idea of just reading the Bible, but I feel I need some sort of guidance and just reading the Bible doesn't offer that community aspect I've been looking for. There's been some online church services that I've heard about as well, but I feel like that's so impersonal, somehow and that the screen between me and everyone else in the community there at the church will be a barrier somehow.

I've heard that there are some churches around the country that are opening up for outdoor, masked and distanced services, and I think that's a wonderful idea, and something I'd absolutely go to right now. I haven't heard of any churches in my area doing that, but hopefully one will do that soon.

I think Liam thinks that my wanting to go to church is kind of ridiculous. His stance is that if there was a God, why would they let so many bad things happen? The last time we talked about this, he was like "Look at the world right now. So many people have this awful virus, and so many are dying, losing family members and loved ones. So many people's lives have been altered and changed in negative ways by this pandemic. And that's just this pandemic- think of all the other terrible things that have happened in the world- why would God let any of that happen?"

I didn't really have much of a response for that, and it's true. Awful things happen every day. My only thought was that this feels like the abustidty I read about in my books on existentialism. And I guess there can be no inherent meaning in the world, and there can still be good things in the world, but then I'm back to square one with my existentialism and religion

dilemma. But, I feel like if I can still believe that there is good in the world in God, and find a

community of people who think that too, despite all the bad things happening, that's beautiful.

That answer didn't really satisfy him, which I guess I understand. It's not really based on facts or

anything, and Liam likes facts and hard evidence. I just wonder if this is going to be a problem

for us going forward, and that scares me. A lot. But I feel like I need to find answers and figure

this out despite what Liam thinks.

June 3rd, 2020

I very distinctly remember saying when I began this blog that I didn't want it to be a

political blog. I only wanted to cover existentialism and COVID-19, and the changes that

COVID-19 brought to my life. But I'm beginning to feel like there's something I can't leave out.

Maybe about a week ago in Minneapolis, this Black man named George Floyd was killed

by a police officer. He apparently had a $20 counterfeit bill he tried to use to pay for something,

and after the store clerk reported him, four officers arrested him and one of them, Derek

Chauvin, knelt on his neck for nearly nine whole minutes, and killed him. A bystander caught the

entire thing on video, and everyone is appalled. Not only is this police brutality, but it's just

another instance of white police officers abusing their power, particularly over black people in

this country- but this one was caught on video, and everyone knows about it now. Usually these

things are often covered up, I'm learning. While there are instances of police brutality against

people of color, specifically Black people all the time, and there are often peaceful protests

against this sort of thing, this time things were different. More violent, more scary. I think this

was just sort of the straw that broke the camel's back. It was too much. And the fact that it was

all caught on video makes the experience so real for everyone who watches the video. Of course,

the girl who took the video is getting a lot of hate for not doing something to stop the cop,

instead of just taking the video. While I understand that argument, I also think that the reason this instance hit the country so hard was because we had that video evidence. I hate to say this, but it made it real for everyone who has never experienced that kind of thing. I think so many people, especially white people like me, haven't experienced this stuff.

Now, there have been protests in Minneapolis for several days. These protests, I think, started out peacefully, but now there is looting and burning, and there's all kinds of damage. It's scary, and it's terrible that someone would kill anyone this way over an alleged $20 counterfeit bill.

I've seen a lot of stuff on social media about it in the last couple days, and it seems like posts about Black Lives Matter have taken over every social media platform and every news station.

It's so strange to see news stations covering nothing but events related to the coronavirus, but now, you have to go looking for the coronavirus information. The George Floyd and BLM protests are being covered more than the pandemic, which I understand but it's sort of like everyone's forgotten about the pandemic and it's suddenly over. I keep hearing about how people are going to protest, which I support, but I'm not sure how we can rationalize protesting in large groups of strangers in a pandemic when we're all supposed to be avoiding everyone. I guess maybe this is somehow just as important? I really don't know.

I know now, that I have a lot to learn, as a white person with privilege. I know that I will never understand what it is like to be Black in America. In the last few days, many people have been making posts on social media saying that they are going silent online over the next week to learn about race issues in our country (and in our world) and take their time to focus on those things instead of the normal things we see as we scroll all day on our phones. People are

recommending articles, books, documentaries for each other to watch to learn more. People are also encouraging each other to attend protests and to donate money to BLM causes and sign petitions to get these police officers that were involved in the killing of George Floyd charged with murder and other things. I've seen people encouraging others who have any kind of platform, be it social media or some larger platform, to use their voices and educate those who are listening to them. That's in part why I'm writing this. I don't know most of my readers, but I do know that I have a handful of them, and to any of you who are reading this, I encourage you to educate yourself about race issues, and to do something to help this cause. Have conversations, sign petitions, donate.

But another reason I'm writing about this in my blog is because so much of my energy this last week or so has gone into these race issues. So much of my time has been spent watching the news, educating myself, or having discussions with my mother about why she can't say "but all lives matter!" (And believe me, those haven't been easy conversations). If through this blog, I want to accurately portray what this experience this year has been like, I need to include this. It's part of the story, and it would be irresponsible for me to leave it out.

I guess we can hope that while these things that have happened over the past few days have been awful, maybe they'll actually spark some real change this time. People are aware of this movement. People are listening now, it seems. People are educating each other. I really really want to feel hope in this scary time. But I don't know if me saying that is my white privilege talking. That's what's hard about this. I'll never understand what it's like to be Black and to go through something like that, or feel fear in the face of a police officer just because of the color of my skin, or even just be treated differently in daily life. But at least now, I understand that I'll never understand. That's a start.

It may be a few days before I write here again. I feel the need to spend my time educating myself about these things.

June 10th, 2020

Things still feel...intense with the Black Lives Matter movement. There are so many protests all around the country now. There's been some in Vermont, and I've wanted to go, but I don't feel safe. I know I can't go by myself, but I also know that my parents can't come with me. If something bad were to happen and things got violent (which many of these protests have unfortunately gotten violent), my parents aren't the kind of people that can just run away and find shelter somewhere else. They're both older, and neither of them are in shape. My mom doesn't think she can run very fast, and my dad's had knee problems for as long as I can remember, and he's not supposed to run. I still don't know anyone else in Vermont who I could ask to go with me, and I feel like this isn't the sort of thing I should go to by myself.

I've been doing some thinking over the last few days about what I want to do with my time this summer now that my internship has been cancelled, and what I want to do with my life when I graduate. I feel like this is such an *English major* thing to say, but I've really enjoyed seeing the real-life applications of literature these past few months with these Existentialism texts, and I want to try to share that love with others. I started thinking about teaching English as a way to do that. I really think teaching English to high school students while they are in such transitional periods of life would be really rewarding, and I think that I'd enjoy it. And then every time I see my professors during this pandemic working so hard to continue to teach all of us, I have so much respect for them, and for all teachers who put in that kind of effort. I'd love the chance to do that.

There's an Education 101 class that my school is offering as a summer course starting the last week in June, and I've already signed up for it. I think I can also shuffle my class load around a little bit next year and take a few more education classes, as well as a couple of online classes and study for some entrance exams, then I'll be certified to be a high school English teacher by the time I graduate.

It's crazy how fast I was able to decide all of this. But it makes sense. It's something I enjoy, and it's something that I really think might do more good for the community I surround myself with than being a social media manager ever would have.

It also seems strange to say this, since there are so many negative things happening in the world right now, but I'm actually really excited about this. I'm excited for the future, I'm excited to make an impact, and I'm excited to take this class and start this. I can't wait to learn how to share my love for literature with others.

But also, part of me feels bad for having positive emotions right now. Which is kind of ridiculous, but I also feel that I'm a very privileged person because I do feel feelings of excitement and hope when things are so dark and scary. Coronavirus is still running rampant, and it seems like it's getting worse as people focus on other things, like the BLM movement. Some people involved in George Floyd's death have been charged with murder, but there are so many other cases that are now being brought to light where Black people have been killed, and their murders haven't suffered the consequences of their actions. There are still people who are silent about these issues, and people who are unwilling to have discussions or educate themselves. And then there are people who seem to be taking advantage of the fact that people have shifted their focus away from the coronavirus and onto other issues to simply act like this pandemic is over when it's not. And then there's me, who recognizes all of that, is still staying inside quarantining

and staying safe, but is feeling a source of excitement. Maybe I shouldn't feel guilty. It is something to feel excited about, I just feel like it's the wrong time to feel that.

And then, from an existential standpoint, I have a lot of thoughts about this too. I feel as though I'm finding meaning in working towards a career I know is going to make a difference in the world. But existentialism says that life has no inherent meaning. There are things in my life that mean something to me, though. If nothing had any meaning, I wouldn't care about the social issues in our country, and I wouldn't care about missing out on half a semester of college experiences. I wouldn't care about anything. Some things clearly do have meaning to me. So does that mean existentialism is just… wrong?

Speaking of literature, though, I did just purchase another book with themes of existentialism, because I still have unanswered questions. It's called *Notes From the Underground*, and it's something that my professor recommended to me. She said it would relate to some of these political and humanitarian issues that have been brought to the surface in recent weeks, and some of the feelings I've been feeling. I'm looking forward to it.

June 22nd, 2020

I'm really loving my Education 101 class. We've talked about different types of learners and accommodating a classroom full of students that learn differently, so that's been really interesting. We've also talked a lot about the recent shift in learning from classroom based to online based, and what that means for teachers at all different levels. I'm loving it. The class is a pretty big and it's lecture based, but we break out into small discussion groups on zoom frequently, and that gives us a chance to discuss the material with other students and get to know the people in our discussion groups. It's a little strange meeting people over zoom, and never having seen them in person. Last semester, I knew people in my classes already by the time we

started online classes but this is a little different. At first, it seems like starting discussions feels… clunky and awkward. It's so hard to form new connections over zoom. Continuing existing connections over zoom is much easier, and it feels more fluid.

Despite this new activity to keep me busy, I still feel so lonely. Seeing people on zoom calls for class somehow seems to make me more lonely, and I really don't know how to explain it. This pandemic doesn't feel like it's ending any time soon, and other things aren't really getting a whole lot better either. I still feel like I'm sort of waiting for something that isn't ever going to happen, like in *Waiting For Godot*. Are things going to ever get better? And I'm lonely, more lonely than I was a few weeks ago, even though I guess I have more ways to connect with others through this class I'm taking. Maybe life is just full of contradictions and things that don't make that much sense. I'm not sure. I guess *Waiting For Godot* is all about absurdity, and that certainly seems to be reflected in my life right now.

July 1st, 2020

Right now, I feel devastated. My college just announced they are only inviting freshmen and sophomores back to live on campus in the fall, and classes for juniors and seniors will be remote, and those students will live at home. I'm a senior.

In all honesty, I guess it makes sense. They're trying to be safe. A lot of colleges across the country are starting to do things like this. Many colleges are inviting underclassmen back for the fall semester and upperclassmen for the spring semester, just because they feel it will be safer to have fewer people on campus. I know in dorms at my college, the rooms are mostly doubles, meaning you share your room with another student. This obviously isn't something that's safe anymore. People need to have their own rooms in case they get sick. This is another reason why colleges need to have fewer people on campus: they have fewer places to house students now.

I'm trying to not be selfish. I know that the well-being of the people in this country is really important, and if everyone at my school was there, more people would get sick, and more people would die. Most people my age would probably be okay, because it seems like young people tend to have less serious symptoms and tend to recover better from this, but we'd spread the virus to the community around us, and to the older professors if everyone was back at a more rapid rate. I know the facts, and I understand the decision.

But that doesn't mean I'm not upset. I've now lost ¾ of a year of college experience, essentially. And I'm losing part of an athletic season, too. And there's not much I can say or do that makes any of this feel less terrible. I miss my friends, I miss Liam. I miss being on campus and studying in the library and going to the restaurants in town. I miss practicing with my team and going to competitions. What I wouldn't give right now to go back to living a normal college kid life. I'd happily be broke, eating ramen and staying up way too late studying all over again if it meant I live my life the way I'm supposed to be living it right now. I'm angry that I'm here, and not in Louisiana with my friends from high school. I know no one here, and it's not like I can go out and meet people. That's not really very covid-friendly.

I'm frustrated and angry with the people who haven't been staying home, who haven't been careful, who haven't worn masks and done the things they're supposed to. They're the reason I can't go back to school. I'm angry that I've lost even more of a major life experience that I'll never get back, and I'm angry that there's not one single thing I can do to make it better. I'm just angry and sad, and not used to the problems in my life being things I can't do anything about. All my life, my problems have usually had some sort of solution. If I got a bad grade on a test, I'd study more for the next one. If I had a fight with a friend or someone I cared about, I'd sit down with them and talk it out. If I didn't think my times in swimming were fast enough, I'd

eat healthier, get more sleep, push myself harder in practices. I can't fix this. I can do my part, but that's not enough. I'm angry at everyone who isn't doing what they're supposed to.

July 5th, 2020

Well, I still have a lot of emotions about my college not opening back up for upperclassmen, and even though I understand the decision, I'm still angry. And I'm starting to understand the point of view of the narrator in *Notes from the Underground*. The narrator is an anonymous man who is living in Russia in the 1860s. The novel is split into two parts, and the man describes his situation. He is living by himself, completely shut off from the rest of the world. He's disgusted with himself, and he seems to hate who he's become, but at the same time, he looks down on others around him. There's a lot of discussion of free will, and how the narrator has chosen to cut himself off completely from everyone else.

I think if I hadn't read this book right now, if I'd read it before the pandemic, I would have had a completely different reaction to it. I think I would have wondered why the heck anyone would want to be alone (especially if they don't like themselves, and don't like their own company). Why bother exercising your free will that way? It seems as though the narrator is miserable all by himself (although when he recounts memories from his past where he is with others, he seems to have been miserable then, as well).

I guess exercising your free will and staying home in a pandemic is completely different. But now, with people starting to go on vacations and see their friends and things like that again, it can feel a little silly to stay home when everyone else is out and about, starting to get back to their normal lives. The pandemic isn't over, I guess people are just over the pandemic. Which is a concept all by itself, and that's what makes me angry.

It seems like the man in the story is angry at others and shuts them all out because he has had bad experiences with all of them. And now I'm here, angry at others for not being responsible and caring about the health and well-being of others, and I'm also choosing to stay in my house alone (with my parents, but let's be honest. I'm a 20 year old girl living with only my parents. I spend most of my time in my bedroom). I am not shutting the world out. I still facetime my friends, and I'm still interacting with others when I take my education class everyday. But I'm angry, and my response is to stay away. I guess I sympathize with the Underground Man. And I never would have had that reaction if I hadn't read this book during a pandemic.

Do people not understand that their individual actions, when put together with all the actions of other individuals can create catastrophic events? It seems like the virus is getting better in other parts of the world, but not in America. Because people here I guess don't seem to care about others. That fact alone has been really clear these past few weeks, and that might bother me more than anything else.

It's interesting to think about how *Notes From the Underground* is a piece of existential literature, and I'm relating to it, but I'm still feeling confused and stuck on one of the core pieces of existentialism. How can life have no inherent meaning if things like this make me so angry? Maybe it's free will that allows me to care about things, and find meaning in them, even if I process those feelings with negative emotions like anger. Is that how existentialism works? Or am I just yelling into the void here? Because sometimes that's what this blog feels like.

July 11th, 2020

I've been thinking a lot more about this concept of free will that's brought up in *Notes From the Underground*. Seeing people exercise their free will right now to go on vacations and see friends and things like that still makes me angry, because those activities can be potentially

dangerous right now. But people are full of contradictions, myself included, and people are not predictable. We do things that don't follow logic, that don't make sense. I think I can make peace with that when the actions aren't dangerous. But when people do things like see others during a global pandemic and don't wear masks… I just don't understand those kinds of contradictions, and those kinds of actions. I guess that's the thing though. They're not supposed to be understood.

Speaking of contradictions, I'm still trying to figure out the thing with religion and existentialism. I found a church in my town that is supposed to open for outdoor services (distanced and masked of course) sometime in August. I think I'm going to go, just to try to figure this out. Because I do think there are things in life that have meaning. Maybe it's just that everyone finds different things that mean something for them, and all existentialism is saying is that there's no one meaning that applies to everyone. I guess that would make sense, since everyone on this planet is a different person, with a different background, and very different lives. It would make sense that we all find meaning in different things. Maybe that's why there's no inherent meaning. I don't know. Maybe I can find some meaning in religion and in a community of kindness. That's my hope. This year has been so awful, I really hope I can find one good thing to come of it.

My birthday is next month. My 21st birthday. Which kind of sucks. Throughout college, I'd sort of had this vision of getting all my friends together and dressing up in cute outfits and going to a bar and dancing for my 21st, and now clearly that's not going to happen. I can't even see my friends and have a normal birthday with a cake or anything. So that's a bummer. I really wanted to do something to make the day feel special but I'm not sure what that would be. It's just going to feel like any other day.

I've also been thinking about how much of my college experience I've missed out on. And how I really only have one semester of a true college experience left. Only one semester on campus. Even then, I'm not sure things will be completely normal. We'll probably all still have to wear masks, and no one will have roommates, and parties will probably be discouraged, or against the college's rules or something. But I've been thinking about how I have one semester left to do all the college things, and I've been wondering if the time I have spent in college has been everything I wanted it to be. Sure, I got good grades in college, and was an athlete, and made good friends, but I'm going to miss out on ¾ of a year of connections with professors and others on campus, and crazy stories and last minute plans that turn into wonderful memories. I'm going to miss out on who knows how many swim meets and practices. I sort of feel like I'm mourning the loss of my college experience. When I say it that way it sounds a little dramatic, but that's pretty much how it feels. All because some people can't seem to follow the rules, and can't be concerned with the health and safety of others around them.

August 1, 2020

Today was my birthday, and it was actually much better than I'd expected. I woke up this morning to the smell of food cooking, and my parents made a big breakfast for us. Mom had picked flowers from her little garden out back, and it was a really nice start to the morning.

I had my class this morning, and then worked on some schoolwork and reading for my class this afternoon, but this evening, my parents made Italian food, and we had some wine (you know, because it's my 21st!) and of course a cake, and I got to open cards from my friends and family.

So many people I know from home and from college sent cards with really sweet notes on the inside, and lots of people called and texted me throughout the day with very sweet messages.

I was all bent out of shape about not having the 21st birthday that I'd always dreamed of, but I realize now how ridiculous that is. I've been thinking so much about how other people can cause us hurt and pain today, especially as I read *Notes From the Underground*. But I'm beginning to see that life isn't so black and white. I feel like I've had this mindset for a while that life is often black and white with some gray mixed in, but the longer I'm alive it seems like life is almost entirely shades of gray, and very rarely black and white. And I guess that's neither a bad thing or a good thing, it's just a thing.

But I felt so loved today. So many people reached out to me today, and I guess that's the best thing about birthdays. People reach out to you and tell you they care. That's more important than a big celebration.

Liam and I facetimed for a couple hours today while I was working on homework. Something we try to do is replicate sitting in the library together doing homework, and since we're both taking classes this summer, we can study together. After we finished studying, we talked a little bit about me wanting to go to a church service and possibly getting into that. Liam isn't very religious at all, and he has no desire to be very religious. I was worried that was going to be a problem for us in our relationship. I don't think I need him to also be religious, but I would like him to support me, and understand me, and maybe occasionally come to a church service with me once in a while. He said he would be okay with that, and that he's always there to support me. I'm really glad that he said that, because I know some people are not down to have differences of religion in their romantic relationships. I'm just really glad he's okay with that- that was something that was weighing pretty heavily on my mind.

I didn't mention this before, but my professor mailed me another book called *A Man's Search for Meaning* as a birthday gift. It's a memoir, written by a man named Victor Frankl. I

guess it's not a book that's typically read as an existential literature piece, but the note my professor included with the book said there was a lot I could take from it that could be existential. Anyway, this book is about this man's experience as a Holocuast survivor at Auschwitz. I guess there are parts of it that are pretty dark but my professor said there was a lot of positive stuff to take from it too, so I'm looking forward to it. And I'm really happy that my professor actually reached out and sent me that book. I feel like having connections with professors is important, and I'm really grateful to have this one.

I've been thinking about what this blog is going to look like once my classes start again. I have a lot of stuff to do for my classes. They start soon, in a few weeks, and I'm taking quite a heavy course load this semester, so I think I'm just going to finish reading *Notes From the Underground,* then read *A Man's Search for Meaning.* I'd like to finish both by the end of the semester, and write about the connections I see between those books and whatever happens with covid in the coming months.

August 15th, 2020

Well, I did it. I finally made it to a church service. It was outside, and everyone was spaced out and wearing masks. It was one of the first times I've actually been out of the house to do something since I'd gotten to Vermont. I didn't know how to get there, I had to put the address of the church into my GPS on my phone, and that felt weird. I've been here for five months and I still don't know my way around and I have no connection to this place at all.

But now, I feel like if I keep going to these church services, I'll start having some connection to this town.

Anyway. I got there, and I was being all weird and awkward. I parked my car and then I just went and sat down in one of the chairs. There were people milling around talking to each

other, and I was standing there just looking at my phone, doing the thing where I pretended to be very busy with a super important text or something but in reality I was just looking at Twitter. I don't know why I'm so awkward. I was worried I wouldn't connect with people, but I was really worried that if I just started talking to someone it would be weird or they wouldn't want to talk to me or something.

The sermon started, and the pastor gave a talk about something I thought was very relevant- how the support of the community is important in times like these. He first talked about how God never wants us to be alone, and wants us to rely on the support of our friends and family. Then he talked about how we need to love each other despite our differences. I think that last part is relevant because of all the racial issues in our country right now. There were two verses that I really liked: Ephesians 4:3 "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace", and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 "Encourage one another and build each other up".

Throughout the service, I did feel some sense of community, but it wasn't really until after the service that I felt the most connected to everyone around me. I liked the singing, and that made me feel a little more connected to everyone, as we were all singing together in unison.

But after the service, people all stood around and talked again, almost like they didn't want to go back to their homes where they'd all spent so much time this year. At least, that's how I felt. I talked to one girl, who looked to be about my age right after the service was over. She said her name was Emma, and she was a rising sophomore at the local community college. She also had gone to the service alone, so we stood around and talked for a while about the college experience during COVID. I told her I was new to the area, and that I didn't know anyone, and she gave me her number so that we could maybe get together safely sometime. I thought that was so kind.

I talked to a few other people on the way out, all adults, who suggested various online bible studies and told me to look into them on the church's website. Everyone I talked to after the service was so welcoming. I can't believe I thought no one would want to talk to me at the beginning of the service. And I was so worried about going alone, but I guess I really had nothing to worry about. Like I said, Emma was there alone too, and no one seemed to think it was a problem that we'd done that. I'm really grateful that I did feel that aspect of a welcoming community there.

I think I'm going to go back next week, and look into some of the online things the community members mentioned. I'm also going to text Emma. She's two years younger than me, but I still think it would be nice to have a friend here. Maybe we can go on hikes or something together. I'm just sick of being alone in my house. I mean, I guess I have my parents but it feels like we've run out of things to say to each other now, and they are so much older than I am. It makes things difficult. I feel like I can't really talk to them about stuff that matters, either. Like religion or existentialism, for example. They're also in a different stage of life than I am, and their goals are different. Which is understandable- they're my parents and I'm a college student. But in college, I've been used to hanging around others who do have the same goals as I do.

Anyway, as far as the whole religion and existentialism thing, I think existentialism does have room for religion. Yes, existentialism does say that life has no inherent meaning, and basically the whole premise of all religions is that life does have meaning because of their god, but I feel like I've found an answer. Sort of. If life has no inherent meaning, then I have the capability to assign meaning to my life in whichever way I want to. If I want to use religion to assign meaning to my life, that should be fine. I sort of feel like I'm cheating the rules, and I also sort of feel like I've found a loophole, but this seems like a good way to find an answer to this

dilemma. Also, existentialism teaches that life is full of contradictions, so I guess this isn't an exception to that.

It sort of feels weird, doing this kind of reasoning about my own life. I feel like there should be some kind of rule book that I need to follow, but there's not. I guess I get to create my own rules, and that's what I'm doing. I don't know. I guess it's like that Jon Bellion song all over again:

> "Although I guess if I knew tomorrow
>
> I guess I wouldn't need faith
>
> I guess if I never fell, I guess I wouldn't need grace
>
> I guess if I knew His plans, I guess He wouldn't be God…
>
> Maybe I don't know, maybe I don't know
>
> But maybe that's okay"

September 2nd, 2020

Today was my last first day of school. How weird is that? The fact that I'm a senior is weird. And the fact that I started my senior year in my bedroom at home in my parents' house is weird too. I have a couple education classes, and one literature class for my English major. I had three classes today, and I liked my professors. It seems like the professors are more comfortable with Zoom and online learning than they were last semester, so that's good news. The one thing I wasn't really expecting was to actually do any learning today. Usually, the first day of classes is all discussion about syllabi and introductions. But today, the professors mostly said "read the syllabus on your own time. Here's the first powerpoint, please take notes". I didn't really think there was anything wrong with that, at least they aren't wasting our time, but I wasn't expecting that at all.

Also, it was interesting to see how students had different approaches to class today. Some students clearly just rolled out of bed and opened up their laptops, and others clearly got ready for the day and put on real clothes and stuff. There was a good deal of posts on social media, especially from people in my senior class about how it was their last first day of classes ever. Mostly just people showing off their outfits, or people showing off their cute desk setups. I was sort of in the middle. I got up and showered and ate a bowl of cereal before my first class, but I didn't wear a cute outfit or post anything on social media. My desk area, actually my whole room has become kind of a mess. I just have books all over the place and mugs from coffee, and I haven't made my bed or done laundry in days. Maybe that's a task for this weekend, but I feel like since I spend so much time in my room it's gotten really messy. It would be nice to clean it up and open the windows and let some fresh air in. Maybe I'll even buy a couple small plants for the house.

I sort of feel like I'm going to be using school and this blog and everything else I do to keep myself busy just as time fillers until I can go back to campus next semester. But it's still so much time until that happens. Hopefully everything I'm doing is going to keep me busy.

My swim coach at school is running practices for the people on campus, and is recommending that people who are remote this semester should be working out as well. I'm going to have to start getting back into running. There aren't any pools in the area that are open, and my parents don't want me to go to a gym. They think that's not safe right now. They probably aren't completely wrong. I'm sure it's hard to keep a gym really clean when there are lots of people coming and going and using different machines and weights. I miss swimming, and I miss my teammates. I just miss normalcy, I guess.

September 12th, 2020

I feel like I'm waiting for something that's never going to happen. It doesn't seem like covid cases are going down, or really changing at all. I wonder if they're even going to invite us back to campus in the spring. I've seen so many people throwing parties on campus that they're not supposed to be having, and there are several active cases on campus right now. What if the underclassmen mess things up for the upperclassmen? What then? That sounds so terrible. I don't want to spend my whole senior year in Vermont, learning remotely.

Something that's discussed a lot in *Notes From the Underground* is that there are some people who naturally have a better time in life than others and experience less suffering because they have more privilege. I keep thinking about how some of the students at my university who have a lot of money can get away with doing things like throwing parties and the university still won't kick them out, they can just pay extra money. But these kids are getting other students sick. I just don't see how that can be okay. If a student without much money threw a party, they'd be kicked off campus, and that would be the end of the discussion.

But on a much larger scale, this virus seems to impact people who have privilege less. People who are white typically have more money in this country, and those people are likely to have jobs that are more secure, and they haven't lost their jobs like so many others in this country. They are also less likely to be working in essential jobs that require them to work there in person, and they can stay safe at home and work remotely. This means they are less likely to catch the virus in the first place. Then, you have to consider what happens when people with privilege do catch the virus. These people are more likely to be able to afford medical care to make sure they don't die from the virus.

But then, when you think about people who don't have privilege and what their experience with covid is like, it's very different. People who have hourly jobs at grocery stores or factories or things that can't stop or move online during the pandemic are forced to be in contact with many people throughout the course of each day, increasing their risk of getting the virus. Then, once they have it, they may not have insurance or money to pay for healthcare, meaning their survival rate is so much lower.

It's so strange to think that this virus affects people differently who are in different social classes in this country. When I was growing up, I just sort of assumed that everyone could get medical treatment because of how many hospitals, doctors offices' and standalone emergency rooms there are everywhere. It never occured to me that some people don't have the means to pay for those services. We were actually talking about this in one of my classes the other day, and it's obvious that that's never been a thought for so many of my classmates too. So many of us are so privileged that we've never had to think about that. But I guess that makes sense. Though most of us who go to college aren't on full rides, we have scholarships, but also many of us have people who are helping us pay for our education. Parents, grandparents, whoever. We're all people of privilege, for the most part. And so many of us are only starting to realize that.

Speaking of privilege, I was going back and reading some of my older blog entries, and I realized that I talked about the Black Lives Matter protests and everything… like once. And then I stopped talking about it. I guess it's not super related to existentialism, but the fact that I have the time to sit here and run a blog and talk about what I think the meaning of life is, and there are people that feel like they don't have the basic rights and respect they deserve as human beings. It's like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: I'm at the top, figuring out self-actualization and there are people still fighting to figure out their basic needs as people. I have privilege. There's no getting

around that. And then the fact that I talked about it a little, and then didn't address it again… well, I feel kind of disgusted with myself. And yet I don't know what to do about it.

More on the topic though, *Notes from the Underground* was written around the time that social issues and class were just beginning to be more understood in Russia. I feel as though the USA is also going through a phase where we're beginning to understand our social issues too. Although, when I say "we" , I think I mostly mean the "we" that's my generation. I'm not sure that everyone from the older generations are beginning to understand these issues as much. Maybe because they feel like if they acknowledge their privilege, they have to begin to take steps to fix the problem, and then they lose some of the good things in their lives. Maybe I'm wrong, that's just a guess. But it's starting to cause some divides in our country, especially politically. I feel like maybe that's not a good thing, considering the upcoming presidential election in a few months. I do know that there's often a larger political divide before presidential elections though, as people become more informed about current events, but this year I feel as though it's more extreme. People are already more aware because the pandemic is impacting everyone so much that it feels nearly impossible to not keep up with the news about it, and then there have also been so many other things that have happened this year that require attention to the news.

September 15th, 2020

Liam's not feeling well. He texted me yesterday saying that he had a cough and this morning, he has a fever. Those are typical covid symptoms, and I'm really worried. He's supposed to get a test tomorrow.

I'm not sure how any of this happened. He's doing the same things I'm doing. He stays home most of the time, and occasionally meets up with friends outside, but they always wear masks. And none of his friends that he's seen recently have had covid symptoms or tested

positive. He occasionally goes to the grocery store or the pharmacy or stuff like that to run errands for his parents, and they're both working at home. I guess it just freaks me out that you can do everything right- you can wear a mask, and stay far away from people and follow all the rules and still get covid. It's scary. And I know he's young, and most young people our age don't have too many problems with covid- it's like a flu for a week or so and then they feel better. But that's not always the case. What if something happens?

And it's not like I can do anything to help either. I can't go see him, because I'm here in Vermont. But even if I was there I couldn't go see him since that might mean exposing myself to the virus. I feel this existential idea of absurdity echoed here in this situation. I wish I was there, but even if I was, there wouldn't be a single thing I could do to help. I'm just here. Waiting. Waiting for this to be over. It doesn't feel like it's ever going to be over.

September 25th, 2020

So Liam got his result back today, and he is positive. He couldn't get a test the day he wanted to, and then he couldn't get the results back for days. He had covid, and now he's feeling a lot better. He did have flu-like symptoms for about a week. And now he just has a cough that's beginning to go away, so that's good. Those few days where he didn't know if he had it, when he was waiting on a test, or waiting on test results, but was pretty sure he did have it, felt kind of scary. I tried to not let it show whenever we talked on the phone or texted how scared I was for him. But I think he did realize, and there were times when he was trying to comfort me, which was absolutely ridiculous. I'm just glad it seems like he's almost kicked this thing in the butt.

The last few days I've been so exhausted. I've been staying up late doing homework and getting things done for my classes, but also trying to be there for Liam whenever he wanted to call or something. I'm exhausted and I just need to sleep for a very long time.

It's interesting to think about how last semester, in March, when this all started, professors scaled back. The argument was "There's a pandemic! We need to go easy on everyone because this is a tough time". But the thing is, there's still a pandemic. There are more cases of covid now than before, and people are more at risk now. But the professors are no longer scaling back. Everyone has just adapted to living this weird, disconnected life, and tasks and assignments are piling up. It seems like people's expectations for what they should be accomplishing right now are through the roof. I've been so busy and overwhelmed with my classes that I haven't had time to start my new book that my professor sent me for my birthday, let alone finish the last few pages of *Notes From the Underground.* I've wanted to go to more church services and look into the resources they have online for guided Bible studies and I haven't had the energy. I've wanted to start running more but I only seem to have the time and energy to workout on the weekends when I don't have classes. I feel so incredibly overwhelmed right now, and I don't see that really ending until the end of the semester. I'm just waiting, still. Waiting for this nightmare to be over.

October 6th, 2020

Well, the good news is that Liam has completely recovered. The even better news is that he's going to come out to visit for Christmas. Unfortunately, his car is really old, so it probably won't make the drive all the way out here, and he really doesn't want to take a plane right now, which is understandable. He's going to rent a car and drive out here after he quarantines at home for two weeks, all a few days before Christmas. We'll spend Christmas together here, then I'll drive us both back in my car in time for my swim practices to start on on December 27th (which is the plan for the swim team, at least for now. Hopefully nothing changes).

I was saying last time I wrote a blog post about how I keep waiting for this nightmare to end, and in some ways, I feel like I won't believe that this is over until I see it. I'm not going to believe any of this until we're in the car, driving back. But on the other hand, I can almost see a little bit of a light at the end of the tunnel. It doesn't seem like covid is going away any time soon, but it does seem like my life might be getting a little bit better. At least being back on campus and seeing my friends and being with Liam for Christmas will feel a little bit more normal. But I have all these unnecessary worries too. Like, by the time Liam and I get to be together, it will have been nine months since the last time we saw each other. What if our relationship doesn't work in person anymore? Or what if something happens and the covid situation gets worse and my college asks us all to leave again? What then? Or what if swimming gets cancelled again and that's the end of my athletic career? Or what if I don't get to live with my friends, who I trust, and I get randomly assigned to campus housing with strangers that I don't trust? All of these worries feel sort of unnecessary, but at the same time they're things that are in the realm of possibility. I don't know how to feel. I want to be positive, but I also don't want to be positive and assume that things are going to get better, then have them stay the same, or get worse, and have gotten my hopes up for nothing.

In other news, I feel similarly about the election. Nearly everyone I know supports Mr. Biden, and does not like President Trump, and I agree with them. Not only do I disagree with a lot of his policies but he's extremely hateful and seems to me to be more interested in gaining power over the people in this country than he is interested in fixing the country's problems and making the world a better place. The predictions for the presidential election election in November mostly say Biden is going to win, and it seems like everyone I know is going to vote for Biden, but I'm still worried. There also seem to be a lot of very loud Trump supporters out

there. I'm worried if Trump is president again, we're going to see continued problems with

covid, climate change, and racial injustice in this country, and I honestly feel like things would

be even more chaotic than they are right now. And that's saying something.

Anyway. All that to say that Trump has covid now… and he's old. It seems like he's got a

great medical staff on his side, but what in the world happens if he dies? Especially so close to

the election?

Everything that is happening right now is crazy. I never imagined the world would look

this chaotic. One of the themes of *Notes From the Underground*, which I just finished, is this idea

that we alone are responsible for our actions. I guess that means we're responsible for the

situations we wind up in then, which means that all of this is our fault. I guess that makes sense-

we did vote for Trump as a president (although Hillary Clinton did win the popular vote) and

climate change and the craziness of covid are also due to humans not understanding the impacts

of their actions. But then at the same time, another theme in the play *No Exit* is that misery

comes from our inability to completely control our own lives and experiences. To a very large

degree, other people's actions impact us. We're in this situation because of other people, and

because of their actions. But other people are in this situation because of us, and because of our

actions. It's certainly something to wrap my head around. Especially when I'm in the situation

I'm in: which is sitting at home, not leaving ever, unless I'm going to the grocery store for my

parents, essentially, and mostly just living my life within the four walls of my bedroom. I sleep,

go to class, do my homework, read, facetime my friends, and even do yoga workouts sometimes

in my room. I sort of feel like I'm going stir crazy after all these months, and I'm looking

forward to a change. But I also feel like so much has to happen before I get to leave and go back

to campus.

October 10th, 2020

      I met up with Emma today for a socially distanced hike. It started out really nice but then didn't end so well. I don't think I'll see her again. First we talked about how she's been going to that church all her life, and the only reason she's going alone now is because both of her parents are at higher risk for catching the virus, as they both have asthma. She says the outdoor church services are the one normal-feeling thing she's found in this pandemic, and it's nice to see everyone together again, even if we are outdoors and everyone is wearing masks. We talked about career plans and she told me that she wants to be a teacher too, but a science teacher. She's planning on transferring to the University of Vermont after she gets her associates degree from the local community college she's now attending, and so we talked for a while about the differences in getting certified to teach in different states. We also talked about our religious beliefs a little. She told me she's never questioned God's existence or anything like that, just because she grew up with it and the church has always felt like a safe place and a loving community for her to go to. In some ways I think it must be nice for her, not to have ever felt like she needed to question her religion, but in other ways, I kind of can't believe she hasn't questioned anything. That seems very passive. I guess because she's more of a stranger than my close friends and family are, I felt more comfortable talking to her about existential issues. I didn't tell her about the blog, but I explained that this is something I've been interested in recently, and told her about all these books I've been reading. I explained how the ideas of existentialism really draw me in and seem to make sense- all the connections I've been seeing in life and particularly with covid. But when I told her that I've been feeling like existentialism clashes with religion a little bit, and I'm still sort of unsure about religion, she got very defensive and stubborn. Emma talked about how Jesus was the only right answer, and any other

explanation for meaning in life was just wrong. She was kind of rude about it too, which I think was really what bothered me. I don't mind differences of opinion, but I mind when people are rude about things. There was really no need for that. After that discussion we kind of just parted ways. I walked back to my car, and then drove home. I felt very rattled. Talking about this stuff with people is so hard.

I just feel exhausted and tired. I've seen this rudeness when people have differences of opinion on the political level too. Especially lately with the election. I don't know. I guess maybe I thought I'd figured out how existentialism and religion could go together hand in hand, but maybe I'm wrong? I guess I still have unanswered questions. And I really wish that interaction had gone better. I told her my truth, and I sort of feel like she just walked all over it. I'm just tired, and not the kind of tired that a nap can fix. My soul feels tired.

October 31st, 2020

Well, Trump seems to be fine. I guess I should have expected that, with the amount of medical care he had access to. The election is in a few days, and tensions seem to be very high everywhere. People seem to be even more divided than I thought they were. I sent in my absentee ballot a few weeks ago, and most everyone I know that can vote with an absentee ballot has also already voted. I'm almost scared to see what happens next as the results of the election come in.

My conversations with my friends and with Liam have turned almost completely political, except for this evenings' discussions about the many, many social media posts we've seen of people dressing up in costumes to go to Halloween parties. Obviously, this would be completely fine on a normal year, but this year it feels as though these people just don't care about the safety of others. There's bound to be another increase in covid cases after the events of

tonight. There are so many parties, and so many people not wearing masks and not caring about who they surround themselves with. It's enraging. Especially when I see people's posts who have also posted on social media about being safe and wearing masks and not going to parties... this existential idea of absurdity seems to be all over the place now as things seem to make less and less sense in our world today.

I'm going to start reading *Man's Search for Meaning* as a distraction, I think. I've been saving this book, but I think it's time to read it. I need to think about something that's not this pandemic, not this election, and not school. My brain feels fried.

November 3rd, 2020

So, with the influx of mail-in ballots this year due to the pandemic, it seems like they aren't going to have election results for a few days. Yet, here I am, sitting watching the news, listening to people talk about the election (even though it seems like they have nothing to say) and just feeling very stressed out. I'm in a group chat with a couple of my friends from school and Liam and we're all just texting each other, very stressed about the election. It seems like it's going to be very close, and I really worry what's going to happen to our country if Trump wins again. Also, how are there this many people who think Trump is doing a good job? I just can't understand that. I sort of feel like even if Trump doesn't win, I'm not going to be very happy because there are still so many people in this country who could fathom voting for this hateful, mean, terrible man. I guess this is just another example of absurdity. I feel like nothing is making sense.

But I also feel like so much of life already doesn't make sense. Like even if Biden wins the election, and covid miraculously goes away, like there will still be hate and inequality in the

world. There will always be things that don't make sense. I'm not sure why it took a pandemic for me to realize this? But it did…

Is that bad? Am I not observant? Do I need to do better? And what in the world am I supposed to do with this situation about the absurdity never coming to an end? Like, how do I make peace with the fact that life is just absurd, and that's how it goes? That this isn't going to go away?

November 15th, 2020

Well, Biden won the election. Technically, the electoral college doesn't cast their votes until December, but I don't think it's much of a concern. Everything is going to be… better. Maybe not good, but things are going to be better. That's for sure.

I've started reading *Man's Search for Meaning*, and it's certainly an interesting read. The story is a memoir about a man who lived through the horrors of the Auschwitz concentration camp. He seems to persevere through all the terrible things he experiences because he meets a woman he loves while he's there, and is set on making a future with her when they finally leave the camps. The book, while not usually considered an existential text, actually is quite existential after all, and I sort of see why my professor sent it to me now. Like the title says, the man has to search for a will to live throughout his time in the concentration camp- something to keep him going. The man is also religious, so I can see why she recommended this for me, but it does seem like the man is sort of straying from religion, so I guess I'll have to see where that goes.

There's one quote from the book that says "If there is meaning in life at all, then there must be meaning in suffering". That essentially means, to me, that there is meaning in the absurdity of life. Can I find that meaning in faith? Can I find that meaning in just being the best person I can, and trying to make a positive impact on the world? Is that enough?

November 22nd, 2020

Well, apparently there's a vaccine now for the virus. Which is great, but it seems like there's still a lot of issues. For one, there are some people who don't want the vaccine because they think it's been rushed, or not tested enough, or they don't know the long term effects of it. Then there's other people who think the government is going to put a microchip or some sort of tracking device into our bodies with the vaccine??? I think that's dumb. If they wanted to track us, they'd just use our phones. And they do track us with our phones! We already know this. But anyway. It's going to take a really long time to get everyone vaccinated. It seems like distribution is the next hurdle. I guess that makes sense. And people have to get two different doses of the vaccine too, which complicates things.

I guess things still feel absurd. And like I've been starting to realize, I think they always are going to feel absurd. But I do think maybe they're getting slightly better? Hopefully? We have a vaccine, and yes it will be a long time before everyone has it, but we have hope. And we have someone better as our president now too. In my personal life, next month, I'm going to see Liam next month and I get to go back to my college campus, start swimming, and see my teammates. At least, that's the plan.

I'm still really concerned that my relationship with Liam isn't going to work anymore. I mean, it's been a very long time since I've seen him. And we've realized that there are more differences between us than we'd thought. Like the thing with the religion. It seems like he's okay with our difference in beliefs, but things might be different when we're actually together in person. I'm worried.

I'm also worried something will change with my situation for going back to school. Maybe my college will change their mind, and we won't go back after all. And then what, I spend the rest of my senior year of college in my bedroom at home? No thank you. I guess things are still absurd and uncertain. That doesn't seem like it's ever going to change.

December 5th, 2020

I have about a week until my finals are over, and I couldn't be happier about it. As much as I value my education, this online learning and constantly being on my computer is really hard. And the professor's expectations have been all over the place. There are some professors who seem to understand that online learning is difficult and it's hard to be focused all day when there's all these crazy world events and things are just weird, and then there are others who seem to think that school is somehow easier now that it's all online, and they've ramped up their classes and made them so much harder.

Online finals aren't going to be fun, and then I have a few final papers and presentations as well, so next week is going to be very busy. I did finish *Man's Search for Meaning* this week, though, so that's good. I really enjoyed it. There were some descriptions of the things at the Auschwitz concentration camp that were really hard to get through, but the man's enduring strength and refusal to give up hope and give in to the situation he was immersed in was really inspiring. It seems wrong to me to compare a pandemic to the Holocaust, but if this man could get through that expereince and not lose hope, I can get through this experience, too.

Something else that really stuck with me from the book was the idea that suffering is a test of faith. If this suffering that I've experienced this year (even though I haven't caught the virus myself) has caused me to look towards faith for answers. Now, I sort of feel like I don't have answers. Somehow I think I have to find peace in that. Not having the answers. The world

is absurd, and we don't have answers, and logic doesn't always seem to apply to the situations we find ourselves in. I guess I just have to focus on the good parts?

I think I am finally starting to believe that I am actually going to return to campus in a few weeks. I'm also finally starting to believe that I am going to see Liam soon, and see my friends soon, even if that looks different now than it did before. Now that my move in date for my college is only a few weeks away, and nothing has changed or been cancelled yet, I'm really starting to believe that maybe good things will happen. Hopefully. I'm still a little scared my hopes are going to be crushed. Maybe I need to make a gratitude list.

- Liam, and my friends that are constantly there to support me

- The semester is almost over, and I'm getting good grades

- Next semester I'll have some in-person classes, which is good because I'll be able to concentrate better in those classes

- I have a car that I feel safe enough in to drive all the way back to campus

- I get to see Liam in a few weeks

- People are talking about the vaccine, and apparently it's going to roll out to medical staff and other healthcare professionals soon

It feels so weird that my life is going to return to normal (at least, a little) when the pandemic isn't over. Especially since cases are higher than they were back in March when we all had to leave campus.

December 30th, 2020

It feels like it's been a long time since I wrote an entry. This is also going to be my last entry for a while. Maybe forever, maybe not. Maybe I'll come back to this. Let me explain.

In the past few weeks, a lot has happened. I had finals week, and like I anticipated, I was too busy to read any more existential texts, or to do much of anything but finish up my schoolwork. And then the day after finals was the day that Liam drove out.

Getting to see him again after such a long time was amazing. I was so worried that we'd grown apart and that our relationship wouldn't work anymore, but that wasn't the case. The only thing now is that we have differences of opinion about religion. And that doesn't really seem to be a problem right now. Maybe it will be later in life, maybe not. But other than that, it feels like we sort of picked up right where we left off.

We didn't do much when he was here. We stayed in and watched a lot of movies, and we hiked a couple times, but it was really cold so there wasn't too much of that. Mostly, we just sat and talked about things. We talked about career plans, and that led to my explaining to him why I wanted to be a teacher.

All this time, I've felt like I couldn't talk to my friends or Liam about all this existential stuff. Whenever I would talk to my friends about big questions that existentialism brings up, they sort of brush it off like it doesn't matter to them, or call me a nerd for liking philosophy. And then there was that whole experience with Emma. But for me, though, I felt like if I didn't have some sort of answer to those big questions, I wouldn't be able to live my life properly. But I felt like if this relationship with Liam is going to work long term, he needs to know about this. It's important to me. Really important to me. I didn't really know how to tell him, until we attended this virtual concert thing. Let me explain.

This band that we like, AJR, was planning to go on tour right when COVID-19 became an issue, and had to cancel their tour. So they wanted to do this livestream of a virtual concert instead, just to give their audience something. They announced this months ago, and Liam and I

had been looking forward to it because we'd actually bought tickets to go to one of the concerts over the summer in Ohio, but then obviously didn't get to go. We got a ticket for this virtual concert, which was right after Christmas, and it was amazing. We got to hear a couple of their new songs, and getting to see them perform (even if we weren't there in person) was still cool. Anyway, the last song they played was one called "100 Bad Days". Here are some of the lyrics:

"A hundred bad days made a hundred good stories

A hundred good stories make me interesting at parties

Yeah, no, I ain't scared of you

No, I ain't scared of you no more"

And then, after they sang the song, one of the guys in the band talked about how even though they didn't write this song about 2020, or the pandemic, it still applies. We might all have had 100 bad days this year- or maybe just an overall really bad year. But now we have a story to tell.

And it kind of hit me. At the beginning of the pandemic, I was comparing myself to Shakespere and thinking I ought to do something big, like Shakespere and all the plays he wrote during the black plague. But I did do something. I wrote this blog. I wrote about my 100 bad days, and now I have a really good story. I'm actually really proud of this blog. I can see people are reading it, and I figure people must be getting something out of it, if they're still reading it. But I wrote my story, that's the point. And I shouldn't be scared to share it with Liam. It's my truth. So I kind of turned to him after the concert was over, and said "I wrote my story. About my 100 bad days".

I explained to Liam that I've been working on reading these texts, and connecting them to the things I'm experiencing in real life, and that the literature has really brought me a lot of clarity about some of these things, and I want to find a way to help others do that, which is why I wanted to be an English teacher. But I couldn't really explain it without talking about this blog. So, I told him about the blog, and now he's read some of it. And we've had discussions about it. I finally have someone to talk to about all of this- and he was right here the whole time. Maybe Liam and I have more in common than I'd thought.

Something that was a big theme in *A Man's Search for Meaning* is this idea of optimism that keeps you going throughout the tough times. Now that I'm back on campus for swim practices, and I've spent some time with my teammates and with Liam, the world seems brighter. There's still a pandemic. We still have to wear masks everywhere on campus and be careful about where we go and who we interact with. But it's easier to be positive now, when my life feels a little more normal.

All of this is not to say everything is great now, because I realize that the absurdity won't go away. This is life, and this is how it's going to be. To expect something different would be wrong. And this isn't a normal college experience anymore, but I'm grateful to be here. It's become apparent to me that between my swim practices, senior projects, internships, and my class load for this semester, I won't have time for this blog anymore. But that's okay. I'm going to try to talk to Liam about these things. And my philosophy professor, and maybe try talking to my friends about these big questions again. I guess this is a good stopping point anyway. My life is going to be very different now that I'm here on campus again.

As weird as things are going to be at school now, I'm still excited for the semester. We're going to have a couple dual swim meets, and I get to live with a few teammates who I trust on

campus. There's going to be some fun stuff. And my journey with existentialism isn't over yet either. Maybe I won't have time for this blog this semester, but if I know me, I'll always be asking the big questions.

Link to Online Blog:

https://sites.google.com/view/covid-19-connections/home

An Explanation of COVID-19 Connections

Introduction

Throughout my first few weeks living at home after the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I began to see connections between the experiences the pandemic was providing and existential theories I'd learned about in classes. Throughout my experience in the Honor Scholar program, I'd taken a class called "The Art of Living Dangerously" that introduced me to existential literature. I found the material very interesting and captivating. I felt so surprised that I was able to take a class in college that covered concepts that really mattered to me and asked the big questions. Like Rose, I was hooked, and wanted to learn more. I knew I'd do my honors thesis on existentialism, but I knew that was too broad, and I didn't know how to narrow it down. I took a Literature of Existentialism class, where I read many of the texts that Rose read throughout her semester, and I became more acquainted with existential theory. However, it wasn't until the pandemic hit that I had a more clear idea of what I wanted to do with my project.

The original project was nothing like the end product I created. My original vision for the piece was much more hands-on, and more creative. I initially wanted to construct a physical room out of wood in the basement of Peeler that would represent quarantine, with things such as eating at restaurants, being with friends, going to concerts, painted on the outside of the room. Inside the room, the things that got us through quarantine, such as frequent facetimes with friends, really good books, and more depicted in a variety of ways on the inside. I then planned to write a paper to accompany the exhibit that would draw connections between the exhibit and existential theory.

But as quarantine wore on, and I began to realize that COVID-19 would not be going away in two months like I had previously thought, I realized that I was going to need to rethink

my thesis. Big groups of people were (and continue to be) places for COVID-19 to spread, so having an art exhibit with many people wasn't something I could do. I also then was not able to be on campus at all for my first semester of my senior year, which would have made it impossible for me to create this project. After talking with my cousin, who is much like me and very creative, and one of the professors who taught many of the existentialism classes I took, I came to the conclusion that I could still do a creative thesis, but I would need to do it in a written form. I decided to share some of my experiences with existentialism and the pandemic through a blog of a college student. By making the blog fictional, I could implement some of the things that happened to me, and relate them to existential experiences, but I could also create new experiences for the character, and explore new ideas and themes.

The blog format allowed me to leave entries whenever I felt it was necessary for the development of the story. It also allowed me to let the character go through her experiences in a chronological order, not knowing what to expect. This created more room for existential development, as the character, Rose, felt overwhelmed and unsure of what to expect as far as the pandemic goes most of the time. This gave the piece more of an existential feel, rather than if I had written the piece from the perspective of Rose in December, telling the story while knowing the "ending". The piece felt more real this way, which was a key element in the tone. It also left room for things to be untidy at the end of the story, when Rose left the blog in December. While Rose was finishing the blog, her story and her experiences with COVID-19 were far from over, since the pandemic is still not over. As I wrote this, I had some idea of where the story was going to go, and a vague idea of the ending of the story, but I did not have specifics. I felt as though since this blog was partially based on my own experiences in the pandemic, I needed to wait until they happened to write about them. I started writing the blog around October 2020, and

planned to have the entries finish in December. Waiting until I knew I would be going to return to my campus for my second semester of my senior year was imperative, for example, because if I found out that I wouldn't be returning to campus, I might want to change my plans for the ending of the story. When writing a scene that's emotional, it is helpful to have lived through the situation, or something similar, to make sure the emotions I'm writing are as genuine and real as possible.

The blog also allowed Rose a space to put her thoughts about everything that was going on in her life in a place where her friends and family wouldn't likely see, but where other people-strangers, might read her blog and feel as though they related to her. Something I felt a lot especially at the beginning of the pandemic was a desire to know that I was not alone in the ways I was thinking or feeling. I imagine many people had that desire, and Rose's blog allowed her to share how she was feeling with others, even if they were strangers, and the readers of the blog helped her not feel as though she was so alone. As she begins to grow more comfortable with talking to the people in her life about the big existential questions she has, she has less need for the blog, and this is around the time she ends the blog. Most of the design of the blog is very simple, and this is for the purpose of making the actual entries stick out, as this is the most important part of the text itself.

While Rose's character goes through some of the same experiences that I went through throughout the first nine months of the pandemic, she is a fictional character. I purposefully wrote her character to have some flaws. For example: she talked about the Black Lives Matter movement almost exclusively for an entire entry, then only returned to the issue once or twice more throughout the rest of her entries. This makes her seem as though she doesn't really care about the Black Lives Matter issues as much as she says she does the first time she mentions it in

her blog. Adding character flaws made her a more real, human character whose experiences seems more relatable and more believable.

It's important to address that Rose's experiences are different from my own, even though I did base some of her experiences on mine. I chose my experiences that related to existential texts I'd read in the past, and used those in the blog entries. I changed details when I felt that I was writing too closely my own life. Changing details that added to the story, for instance, making Rose an English major, instead of a communication major like me, lead to an entire storyline where Rose figures out what she wants to do with her life when she graduates from college. This small detail change added greatly to the story, as Rose's search for finding meaning in her life through her career does connect to some existential concepts throughout the blog posts.

Themes throughout the Piece

Waiting

One of the themes I wanted to be sure to address throughout this piece was the idea of waiting, particularly waiting for something that may never happen. Rose waits for life to go back to normal, for quarantine to end, and for COVID-19 to go away. At first, she thinks that her life will return to normal in two months, but as time goes on, and she realizes that her life is not going to return to normal anytime soon, she begins to feel as though she is waiting for something that will never happen. She references *Waiting for Godot,* a play in which the two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, seem to be waiting for someone who will never come. This person, called Godot, is often assumed to be God, and Vladimir and Estragon are assumed to be waiting for the second coming of Christ. While Rose does go through a bit of a religious awakening throughout the first nine months of the pandemic, the important piece here in referencing this

text is the elements of waiting that are reelected in *Waiting for Godot* and Rose's blog posts. Rose finds comfort in her friends and the little things in her life, such as reading and frequent facetimes with her friends, and music that she enjoys. While the waiting that Rose does throughout the pandemic makes her feel as though her life is meaningless, she is constantly trying to find meaning in her situation: through religion, through planning her future career, and through having meaningful relationships with the people she's close to. Rose's desire to find the truth and see what's real throughout her time at home in quarantine makes the waiting seem worth it in the end, as she's come to some sort of peace about the time at home, having grown personally in many different ways. The reality of Rose's growth contrasts with Rose's original feelings that her time in quarantine feels meaningless because she feels as though she is waiting for something that is never going to happen- thus, bringing about feelings of absurdity.

<u>Free Will</u>

Another concept relating to absurdity that Rose addresses frequently in her blog posts is this idea that everyone technically has free will, but if everyone exercised their free will, society would crumble down. Through her studies of existentialism, she finds that free will is an important tenant to the overarching ideas of existentialists. However, she thinks about the consequences of everyone exercising their free will, and realizes that the results would be disastrous. People are being encouraged to stay home, stay safe, and stay away from others. People generally abide by these rules in the beginning of quarantine, but as the months wear on, people begin to grow restless, and they start participating in more risky behaviors as the country starts opening up again, such as being in large groups of people while being unmasked. Rose expresses her frustrations with these people and their actions throughout quarantine, as she sees fellow college students posting photos of themselves partying. Rose knows that leaving people to

make their own decisions and live their own lives, therefore finding their own meaning in life is important, but she struggles to make peace with those ideas when they put other people at risk for danger. The only way she really can make peace with these ideas is to simply say "this is absurdity at work" and dismiss it, realizing that she cannot have an answer for every question she has.

Loneliness

While many people felt lonely throughout quarantine, Rose had a little bit of a different situation. Not only is she an only child, but she does not know anyone near her (until she begins meeting people at church, of course) other than her parents, because of her parents' move. But in addition to this, she feels as though she cannot talk to the people she is close to about her big questions in life concerning religion, meaning in life, and existentialism. Most of this is due to the fact that she feels like she will be made fun of, or like her loved ones will dismiss the topics and questions that she finds so important. Not being able to bear this idea, Rose decides to find another outlet for her thoughts.

Through the blog though, she becomes more comfortable talking about these things to people who she doesn't know. Once she becomes more comfortable with strangers, she tells her professor about the blog, then has an in-person conversation with someone at her church about existentialism, and then she finally opens up about all of these things to her boyfriend, Liam. Through all of this, she begins to feel less lonely, but there is still an element in the blog of loneliness, as Rose cannot physically be with many of her loved ones because of the pandemic.

Society and Class

Rose realizes how the differences in classes in the country affect much of her experiences throughout the pandemic. Issues of society and class are addressed in many different existential

works. There is the existential idea that life is not fair, and part of this is due to the differing classes and levels of privilege in society. Rose sees real life implications of these things for the first time during the pandemic, and begins to recognize her own privilege. Through Rose's experience of the Black Lives Matter movement, she becomes more educated about some of these issues, and sees that there are people who have led very different lives then Rose has, just because they have a different skin color and different levels of privilege.

Rose also notices how privilege leads to different experiences with COVID-19. She states that "People who are white typically have more money in this country, and those people are likely to have jobs that are more secure, and they haven't lost their jobs like so many others in this country. They are also less likely to be working in essential jobs that require them to work there in person, and they can stay safe at home and work remotely. This means they are less likely to catch the virus in the first place. Then, you have to consider what happens when people with privilege do catch the virus. These people are more likely to be able to afford medical care to make sure they don't die from the virus". This is not an unusual realization, either. Many people in our country have only recently become aware of these sorts of things.

Religion and Existentialism

Rose feels drawn to both religion and existentialism throughout the course of the blog, but does not really see how these go together at first. While of course these things do not blend seamlessly together, she begins to see that they can go together. While existentialism says that there is no inherent meaning in life, it also says that because there is no inherent meaning, everyone can find meaning however they choose. Rose chose to find some meaning in religion, and the community aspect of the church, and carrying on her grandmother's legacy. Of course, even at the end of the blog, she still has questions about how these things will continue to work

together in her life, but this continued questioning was written into the blog on purpose. Part of existentialism is understanding that there are more questions than there are answers, and any way Rose (or anyone) can find peace in that is okay. This was not an easy topic to discuss, as there was no neat and tidy way to tie up the storyline at the end of the blog posts, but this sort of unfinished feel to this part of Rose's life made the most sense for this topic, as it is all about not having all of the answers.

Writing the Piece

Writing this piece was much more emotionally taxing than I had expected. No one's experience with this pandemic has been easy these past few months, and my experience was no exception. Like Rose, I lived at home with my parents, in a place where I didn't know anyone, and I wasn't familiar with the surrounding area. I didn't get to see my friends, my boyfriend, or any family except for my parents for nine months, and like Rose, I worried those relationships would deteriorate as I spent time away from those people. I also felt my relationships with my parents were strained at times (although this was to be expected, living in the situation that we were in). My grandmother passed away in early May of 2020, and I experienced grief in a different way than I ever had before. Then, as school started back up, and I was not on campus, I felt as though I was missing out on so many experiences on campus. So, at first, when I was at home the first semester of my senior year, working on schoolwork, including writing this piece, felt a little bit like an escape for me. Writing was a bit easier, and I had plenty of time to work on schoolwork, so I was able to get a large amount of the piece done.

But writing the piece during my second semester was a completely different story. I came back to DePauw in early January of 2021 for my sport, expecting everything to be great. Of course, there were brand new problems for me to tackle that I hadn't expected in various areas of

my life, and I tried to use writing the piece as an escape again. But putting myself back into the mindset of being stuck at home, feeling helpless and confused about the state of the world was a really weird feeling. I felt as though I was reliving some of the really unpleasant moments of being stuck in this situation, and I didn't really want to do that. I struggled to keep the tone of the piece the same, feeling as though the writing that I was doing, while no longer stuck at home in the same position as Rose, was going to lose some of its authenticity. It was much more difficult for me to write this piece while back at school. I also made some revisions to the piece overall once I was through with it in the spring of 2021. One example of a revision was the ending of the piece, where Rose explains to her boyfriend about her blog as a result of watching a virtual concert with him put on by one of their favorite bands who produces very existential music. This concert actually happened, and was something I did watch with my boyfriend when he was able to visit over Christmas break. However, I didn't originally make this a part of the thesis, as I originally felt it was too close to real life, and something that my boyfriend and I experienced together that I didn't want to share. But I decided it would be a great segway into Rose's explanation of the blog to her boyfriend, so I wrote the concert in, without some of the details of my actual experience.

Conclusion

        While challenging, this piece was at times even enjoyable to write. Since the pandemic is new, there is virtually no literature based on this specific pandemic. It is my hope that this piece will open the eyes of the readers to a new way of looking at the pandemic- rather than through a scientific lens, a philosophical lens. Through writing this piece, I have been able to see some value in the things that I know my friends and I have experienced throughout the pandemic. Things that our society experienced throughout the past year such as grief, loneliness, fear, and

even boredom and confusion can sometimes lead to growth, much like the growth we see in

Rose.

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